

if, through neglect of a remediable defect, the child's earning capacity is practically cut in half. Above all the public needs to be constantly educated in one thing: that is, that *it*, as a taxpayer, is maintaining the boards of education and of health, and that *it* has the greatest reason for demanding the highest interest on the capital invested. Such interest to be returned to *it* in the form of children who, upon leaving the public school, shall not only have gained an education, but shall take into the world with them healthy bodies which will enable them to *apply* that education to the best possible advantage to themselves and the community to which they belong.

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### HOSPITAL VIGNETTES: THE OLD-TIME WARDMAID

By GEORGINA J. SANDERS

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HAS she altogether passed away, that austere, tyrannical, talkative miracle of cleanliness, with her immense respect for properly constituted authority and her profound contempt for each new batch of "*perbationers*"?

Who trained us in those far-away days in the way we had to go? The remote lady in the office in whose presence we stood and suspended labor? The busy head nurse, tied up, it seemed, everlasting in the doctors? Our seniors who saw to it, in self-preservation, that we soon knew when to fetch and how to carry, and various practical parts of our work that otherwise devolved on them? Or the doctors who showed us mysterious spots through the microscope and supplied us unasked with strikingly irrelevant information?

They must all certainly have had their uses. But the authority we feared, before whose ready tongue and contemptuous glance the stoutest quailed, she who taught by experience, expected less than nothing from us, and yet exacted standards it was hopeless to attain, this authority reigned in scornful independence in the ward kitchen, emerging punctually as clock-work twice a day to sweep the wards or scrub the lavatories. Did it matter to her that you had not finished making your beds? Not a bit: it was sweeping time. Or had you perhaps finished early and would fain have begun your dusting? Well, I don't believe any one ever suggested such a revolutionary idea: it was the peace of the whole day in the balance against ten minutes' extra margin to the morning rush of work.

Do you remember your first night on night duty? The mysterious

glamor of at last *really* nursing, the exalted sense of responsibility balanced by that unacknowledged quavering sense of your mighty unpreparedness? How hard you worked! and do you remember how the daylight brought you re-assurance and how, feeling you had steered your barque through alarming difficulties, you triumphantly came to give your first really important report? What took the wind out of your sails? What made you realize that you were less than the least of any would-be nurse that had ever gone before? Alas! had you not altogether forgotten, in spite the warnings of wise friends, that the one thing that really mattered was to keep your kitchen neat for the autocrat whom nature forced to spend the night away from her kingdom? You knew then that you had left your breakfast dishes in unorganized heaps all over the kitchen table, the plates unscraped, the tea-pot full of leaves, and, worst of all, the kettle empty! Lower than the last no one could fall.

How long did it take you to learn to pack your well-scraped plates and emptied cups deftly into the dish-tub and to leave not a trace of your twelve hours' multiple energies, "poor, poor dumb mouths," to testify against you in the kitchen?

But one does not emerge unscathed from such experiences. Though but common clay I own to being a marvel of neatness where just such work is in order, and punctual to despair. As for a kettle I refill it by reflex action. But the other day, passing through a friend's kitchen, in this land where we live in such pleasant intimacy with our kitchens, I surprised her by absent-mindedly touching her tea-kettle and, finding it light, carrying it to the tap, and filling it, apparently quite unconscious of what I was doing. Some lessons of life burn deep into our souls.

At six-thirty she arrived on the scene in a monumental bonnet of black crepe ornamented with a sad but persistent rose. This and her shawl she hung on the kitchen door and not in the closet built for such uses, which closet was an innovation. She carried a bundle consisting of a clean check working apron and a clean white linen one for the afternoon, a comb, and her horn spectacles, never more and never less. Her tidy scanty hair was covered with a too ample black chenille net; her costume a skirt of negative complexion, short and clean with a blouse obviously furnished by our old uniform skirts.

The early morning had been a taciturn period, plates, breakfast dishes, scrubbing, sweeping, always in the same order. Her last act was to scrub her own kitchen floor and cover it with convenient paths of newspaper till it dried, since even her authority had its limitations and she

could not forbid us to enter. The floor was of black and red tiles peculiarly prone to reveal spots. Did you ever in her "hour off" roll plaster of Paris bandages in the kitchen and forget to cover the floor beforehand with newspapers? And did you or did you not go to bed that night a discouraged wreck realizing with bitterness in your soul that you had mistaken your vocation and could never never make a nurse?

After her morning work her floor cloth and brushes and even more times her broom were washed and put out in the sun to dry, a lesson in economy and hygiene to us all. It was her pride that her brushes and cloths lasted longer than those of any other wardinaid. At dinner time she helped us juniors peel the potatoes and saw to it that we remembered our part in good time and had the plates heated and the bread cut. That we might forget duty whose omission caused annoyance only to ourselves or the doctors, of whose importance she had only a casual conception, troubled her not in the least, but in her philosophy the patients' comfort was never a negligible quality, and she never left such details as hot plates to the chance remembrance of a forgetful probationer. At three punctually she took her hour off, preparing for the afternoon leisure by combing her unruffled smooth hair, washing her hands, donning her bonnet and cloak and putting up a clean roller-towel on the kitchen roller. This always seemed to be with her a sign that the strenuous duties of the day were over and the ornamental hour of ease might be recognized. On wet days she seated herself in her kitchen in a low chair near the fire, donned her spectacles and spent her hour over the newspaper, the cat for whom she saved scraps of fish drowsing in company opposite. At seven she banked her fires, filled her kettles and retired for the night leaving, I must own, a kitchen which fairly sang with comfort and cleanliness.

Do you remember the tins in which she kept tea and coffee, starch and other etcetera? A shining row all the same shape and in graded sizes which she had accumulated one by one through many months by keeping a wary eye on every tin she saw in casual use. They were polished like silver on a sideboard and labelled with adhesive strapping which the most skilled among us in the art were permitted to print for her. And did you ever with moist and grubby fingers leave smearable marks on one of those tins? Do I not remember one of our number so sinning and having for punishment to endure the reproachful sight of the precious afternoon hour given up to repolishing every separate, contaminated tin?

Had she any human relationships? A thin pale wedding ring on the finger of her hard-worked hand suggested such a possibility, but the crepe bonnet might be taken as a sign that such a relationship had come

to an end, and its floral decoration that time had elapsed sufficient to mitigate the mourning.

She abominated children and treated the older male patients with a tolerant recognition of their limitations, but the young men in the ward certainly reached a weak spot in her horny heart. She rarely returned to her evening's labor after her prized "hour off" without fulfilling some small commission for one of them—the evening papers—fresh eggs—or even a message from the wife. The old men feared her though she rarely spoke to them; the most incorrigible would sweep his untidy belongings out of sight at her approach, and never but once in the whole years of her reign did a patient in "her ward" require to be reprimanded for forcible language. I could hardly explain who undertook the reprimanding: red tape and reporting in the proper quarter were, in her view, obstacles contrived to hamper the progress of justice.

Once we remember her being ill; it was in one of those winters when influenza was a terrifying scourge. For two days she stayed away and we tasted the joys of liberty and the discomforts thereof. On the third day to our consternation she returned white and meek, poor old dear, but determined. In vain we tried to help her and those in authority to lighten her labors with other help, for in those days our government was paternal and every member of our large family was a considered individual; but we only roused her deepest resentment. Her job, unattractive as it might appear to be, meant daily bread and the sweets of independence: was not failure the sword of Damocles above her head? and any one who tried to make it appear that her work was too much for her, was her bitter foe working to take the bread from her mouth. We had to take her point of view and fall back on feeding her up; I think every individual doctor and nurse with whom she had dealings privately dosed her with a pet tonic, all of which she took, and on the strength of which she recovered.

A time usually came in your training in which she somewhat revised the harsh judgment with which she viewed your character and works. This generally followed on the importation of another nurse from a ward less blessed in its kitchen autocrat. She always referred to the wards as "Annie's ward," "that silly Jessie's," and so on. Of Annie's or Jessie's training of "perbationers" she had, and quite justly, no opinion whatever. Then you reaped the fruits of discipline, then she regarded you with maternal eyes and scrupled not to hold you even as an example to your less fortunate comrade who might sigh in vain for the lax principles of the scorned Annie or Jessie. Her highest mark of favor was shown on the Saturday before Easter when her morning bundle was aug-

mented with a fresh (so to speak) rose, by which the bonnet was to be converted into an Easter creation. The afternoon hour was devoted to this important work. The kitchen door closed, you sat together under the open window, you realizing the full strain of your responsibility with scissors, needle and thread and a clean scrubbing brush with which to brush the crepe, and the intent and anxious owner breathing heavily over your shoulder and watching your every movement through her spectacles. And the pride of completion when the bonnet was tried on before the kitchen looking glass and pronounced with a pent-up sigh of relief to be beyond criticism!

Fellow human soul, learning the lessons we each have to spell, taking the discipline of life as, whether we will or no, we each have to take it, what compensation in the balanced scheme of things did your simple spirit glean in its monotonous surroundings and the daily round of unmitigated drudgery? May the warm recollection of those of us you "trained," as we unconsciously fill our neighbors' kettles, or suffer from other wardmaids sadly different from you, serve as soft pillows to your soul when it earns its rest.

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## THE CARE OF THE AGED

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THE care of old people requires just as much skill, tact, ingenuity, and patience as the care of children, and perhaps more, because one must keep reminded that old people cannot be treated like children even if childish, and that feebleness of physical and mental powers is not accompanied by forgetfulness of early experiences. A genuine affection, gentleness, sympathy, and imagination sufficient to enable one to grasp the patient's point of view are necessary. A nurse who is not a disciplinarian is more likely to succeed with the majority, and if she has a generous sense of humor she will be saved much mental wear and tear in the complications which are sure to arise. The private duty nurse without a sense of humor must have a hard time, for how else can she get the relaxation she so sorely needs while on duty?

"Senility is a normal phase of existence," and may be defined as a "retarded functioning," occurring comparatively early in life in some people, in others being deferred much longer. The primary cause is arteriosclerosis, which lowers the vitality by diminishing the nourishment to the tissues. As people grow old they need to be gently guided in ways of living that will prevent too rapid changes.